

Advent Midweek 1 – 2024

The Incarnation and Its Divine Ripples ~ Justice or Tyranny

Isaiah 42:1-9

Matthew 12:9-21

Have you ever been lied about and you had no recourse to set the record straight? That's awful, right? Imagine living in a world of lies, a world where the truth has been discarded and some profane distortion of reality has taken its place. Now imagine that the lie has invaded every aspect of life, the lie rules every institution, every marketplace, every school, every cultural nook and cranny. Now imagine that the lie brooks no challenge, allows no opposition, permits no question to its authority, suffers no dissent from its sweeping rule. Tyranny; how many human beings have lived in tyranny? Satan is, by definition, tyrannical. Darkness is tyrannical. Sin is tyrannical. Death is tyrannical.

How would you define "justice"? Justice is the idea that people are to be treated impartially, fairly, properly, and reasonably by the law and by arbiters of the law, that laws are to ensure that no harm befalls another, and that, where harm is alleged, a remedial action is taken – both the accuser and the accused receive a morally right consequence merited by their actions. Justice; is it real? Justice; is it objective, recognizable, durable? You have a sense of justice, don't you? Where did that come from? To be sure, your sense of justice has been honed by experience, by real-life situations where you have had to weigh right and wrong in a balance. But how does man even have a category called "justice" to begin with? Has God created us in such a way that "justice" is a central part of our make-up, a central part of our outlook? Why would He do that? If justice is merely a human construct, if justice is merely a fabricated notion that man dreamed up to help him navigate a topsy-turvy world then why is it so strongly embedded in our conscience, why is it so strongly embedded in every culture?

When King Herod, Herod the Great, dispatched his henchmen to murder the baby boys in and around Bethlehem after hearing from the wise men that a king had been born, that was tyranny. Light was coming into the world but Herod loved darkness instead of light because his deeds were evil (John 3:19). Extinguish the light; that is what tyranny wants. Hitler was tyrannical. Nero was tyrannical. One after another, tyrannical leaders are consigned to the ash heap of history. The Light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it (John 1:5). Satan has had his head crushed beneath the nail-pierced foot of the Messianic King (Genesis 3:15). It isn't abstract, Christ's victory over Satan. Jesus made a public spectacle of the devil, triumphing over the evil one by His sacrifice on the cross (Colossians 2:15). Justice isn't abstract. Justice is real, concrete, identifiable, and it is anchored in Jesus and His flesh. There is an unassailable reality that pervades in this world and it is the Justice which Christ established by His death and resurrection. We are not slaves to tyranny. We never will be slaves to tyranny. Man cannot undo what God has done.

God spoke through His prophet Isaiah: "Behold my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my Spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations. He will not cry aloud or lift up his voice, or make it heard in the street; a bruised reed he will not break, and a faintly burning wick he will not quench; he will faithfully bring forth justice" (Isaiah 42:1-3). Is it true? Has it been done? Has Christ's eternal kingdom been ushered in on

this planet? Is justice God's gift, a reality that undergirds this creation by virtue of Christ's once-for-all triumph on the cross? Yes! Most assuredly, yes. Are we only partially aware of it? Is the human work of justice often expressed poorly? Are there those who occupy seats of earthly authority who have no use for anything beyond their personal power? Are you discouraged by such an unhappy truth? That's where the rub lies. Discouragement, partial awareness of a pervasive victory, partial celebration of Christmas; that is where the rub lies.

One rather pithy definition of justice is "to put things right." If we were to broaden the scope of justice it would include treating one another as treasured brothers and sisters, to serve one another graciously, sincerely, lovingly. It takes faith to see that all things are right in this world by virtue of Jesus' death and resurrection. The bible says that "the world and its desires are passing away" (1 John 2:17). To say that another way, the fallen aspects of this world are phantoms, mist, without authentic substance. Christ and His word remain forever (1 Peter 1:25). Truth has enduring substance, divine substance (John 14:6). Justice is a divine commodity that is present among us. Christ has put things right.

The evidence is healing, healing on a Sabbath. Some said it was unjust, unlawful. Some hurled invective as the Messiah who had come to put things right healed a man with a withered hand. The Pharisees has twisted God's Word, even to the point of prohibiting healing on the Sabbath. It was a weird tyranny of man's teaching overruling the substance of God's Word. Jesus attempted to get the Pharisees to see the incongruous nature of their position: "Which one of you who has a sheep, if it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will not take hold of it and lift it out? Of how much more value is a man than a sheep!" (Matthew 12:11-12). Jesus healed the man's hand and the Pharisees conspired about how to put Jesus to death. What does that tell you? Justice is opposed. Tyranny is aggressive, militant, unrepentant and blind. Jesus puts things right and *still* there are those who harbor darkness in their hearts. But the man with the withered hand walked out of that synagogue healed, didn't he?

Our theme for this Advent season is *The Incarnation and its Divine Ripples*. Too often, Christmas is seen as a truncated reality. We give short shrift to what the Incarnation means, how complete Christ's victory is, what elements of His kingdom are so thoroughly among us as to be startling. Perhaps it's because we see so much human failure, so much political foolishness. I had a fellow I play tennis with, a doctor, spend 15 minutes telling me what a failure the legal system is because of the phrase "if it doesn't fit you must acquit." Again, justice in the human realm often seems to go poorly. But does God forgive sins? Has Christ triumphed over tyranny? Do sinners repent and believe the Good News about the reign of God in Christ Jesus? Does our very active Lord confiscate those bound in Satan's grip and bring them into the realm of eternal light? Has not an elevated sense of justice animated Western Civilization so that we begin to aspire to genuine righteousness for all?

Justice is inextricably tied to that baby lying in a manger in a Bethlehem cave. True God and true man, Jesus came to establish justice, He came to put things right and you are a much loved beneficiary of that justice. Justice demanded that He have all sins put on Him. Justice demanded that He pay a hefty price for your lust and your greed and your bitterness toward your neighbor. Justice was done. Justice is forever done. Tyranny is defeated. Believe it! Claim it! Act on it! Celebrate it! Justice is real. Christ fulfilled the demands of the law and His

righteousness is given to you. That is justice. Those who endorse tyranny are pretenders. They're impotent. Justice is real. Christ has made it real. It is His gift. Christmas reminds us.